GMNF TIMBER HARVESTING IS SUSTAINABLE:

As one of the owners of a lumber mill in Bristol, I certainly have an interest in the harvest and the overall principles at stake. I also have a daughter, for whom I care deeply, and wish for her future a livable world. We all have an interest in the future of the planet. We are burning vast amounts of hydrocarbons to fuel our lives. It seems clear to me that burning so much fuel so quickly, fuel that took many millions of years to produce, will have an effect on the environment.

Let’s look at the forests of Vermont. In Vermont, every year we are harvesting a little less than half of the annual growth of timber. There is a higher timber inventory in the state every year, and increased carbon storage. We could harvest more, which I believe we should do, and still have a higher timber inventory at the end of every year, and increased carbon storage. Where we lose forest, it is primarily to development. The hardwood timber that we harvest is harvested sustainably and regenerates naturally with great vigor. This is one of the most frustrating parts of the discussion for me as we are already doing a good job here in Vermont and forest managers are falsely cast as destructive. The managers of the GMNF have been recognized as national leaders in restoration forestry and are doing world-class forestry on the National Forest.

OLD GROWTH TREES ARE NOT THREATENED:

On the GMNF, the managers know the landscape intimately, they have a lot of ground-based data from their extensive boots-on-the-ground experience in the forest. The only old growth timber within the project area lies within the Cape Research Natural Area, where harvesting is not allowed. Claims that the GMNF team plans to log old growth forests of 200 plus years is simply not true and such claims discredit the fine work of the GMNF team. Trees from 80 to 150 years old are the main age grouping harvested for lumber mills and that has always been true.

I believe that on the National Forest, more than half of the forest will never be harvested. Some of that land is designated as wilderness and significant other acreage has usage designations where harvesting is not allowed, is too steep, contains wetlands, has too high an elevation, and so forth. This means that over 200,000 acres of the National Forest in Vermont is already destined to be old growth forest. There are also significant areas that are pulled from any National Forest harvest for the same reasons listed above.

CLIMATE ACTION MATTERS:

I read recently that the Amazon basin in Brazil lost roughly 13,000 square miles of rainforest during the four-year presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, or about 8,400,000 acres. This is a land area about 45 percent larger than Vermont. To me this provides a good definition of not being sustainable. Some of those forest products have found their way into the international marketplace, competing with locally produced products. The flooring at flooring outlet stores might have come from that rainforest. The beef we are eating for dinner and the palm oil keeping our peanut butter oil from separating may have been produced in previously cleared rainforest, proving again that simple choices in our everyday lives have significant effects on the climate and what happens all over the world. Every day we decide many environmental issues by what we choose to spend money on. A bit tangentially, every time a solar project or power line improvement project or wind power project is vigorously opposed as wrong for the community, one has to ask, when are we going to make the uncomfortable choices that will provide renewable energy and the ability to move that energy to where it is needed?

FOREST PRODUCTS ARE USED IN OUR LIVES EVERY DAY:

In Vermont, and throughout the United States, there is a serious housing shortage, causing home prices and rents to rise and many people struggle to find and sometimes fail to find a place to live. The products to build those homes will come from somewhere, perhaps the truly destructive harvesting in the Amazon will provide some of those products. Saying “Too bad for you, we are going to stop building homes”, is not a solution either. I believe that products made from timber harvested from the forests of Vermont, including Federal, State, and private lands should be among the products used in those homes because we are harvesting sustainably.

I believe that harvesting in the National Forest is the environmentally responsible thing to do, acknowledging that we consume products and knowing about and seeing the source of those products. We can displace products in the marketplace that are not sustainable, particularly if people spend their dollars carefully, knowing the source of the timber and the labor to produce those products. Stopping harvesting in the National Forest does not mean that forest products will not be harvested, it means that the harvesting will occur elsewhere, where regeneration of the forest may not occur. I believe the Telephone Gap project is well conceived, utilizes solid science and harvesting practices, and has an excellent purpose in improving the health of the forest, providing improved recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, sustainable forest products for items we and others use in our lives every day, and of course, jobs in the community, perhaps for your neighbor. I consider that to be managing the forest for everyone, and for the climate.

Kenneth Johnson is General Manager and one of the owners of The A. Johnson Co., LLC in Bristol. He believes strongly that active forest management using current best harvesting practices contributes positively to the environment and the community.